

# Life Course Perspective: A Context for Practice

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## Goal

- To make the Life Course Perspective relevant to clinical or programmatic practice

## Objectives

- Upon completion of the session, participants will be able to:
  - To describe Life Course Perspective
  - To identify examples of Life Course in practice
  - To identify challenges to incorporating Life Course into practice
  - To construct needed changes to incorporate Life Course Perspective into practice

## Slides and Ideas Adapted from:

- Jeff Brosco
- Amy Fine
- Cheri Pies
- Milton Kotelchuck
- Karen Edwards
- Michael Lu
- Neal Halfon
- Bonnie Spear
- Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

## What is Life Course?

- Life Course is a theory or perspective that seeks to ***understand, explain, and improve*** health and disease patterns across population groups. (*Amy Fine*)
- Life Course suggests that a complex interplay of biological, behavioral, psychological and social protective and risk factors contribute to health outcomes across the span of a person's life. (*Cheri Pies*)

## Life Course Concepts 'T2E2'

- **Timeline** – health is cumulative and longitudinal, i.e., developed over a lifetime.
- **Timing** - health and health trajectories are particularly affected during critical/sensitive periods.
- **Environment** – the broader environment (biologic, social, physical, economic) affects health and development.
- **Equity** – health inequality reflects more than genetics and personal choice.

*Fine and Kotelchuck, 2010*

A life course approach recognizes the role of time in shaping health outcomes and incorporates time into models explaining health outcomes.

## Time Scales

- Individual time
- Historical time
- Not just about the life of an individual but more about the life of individuals over time (generations)

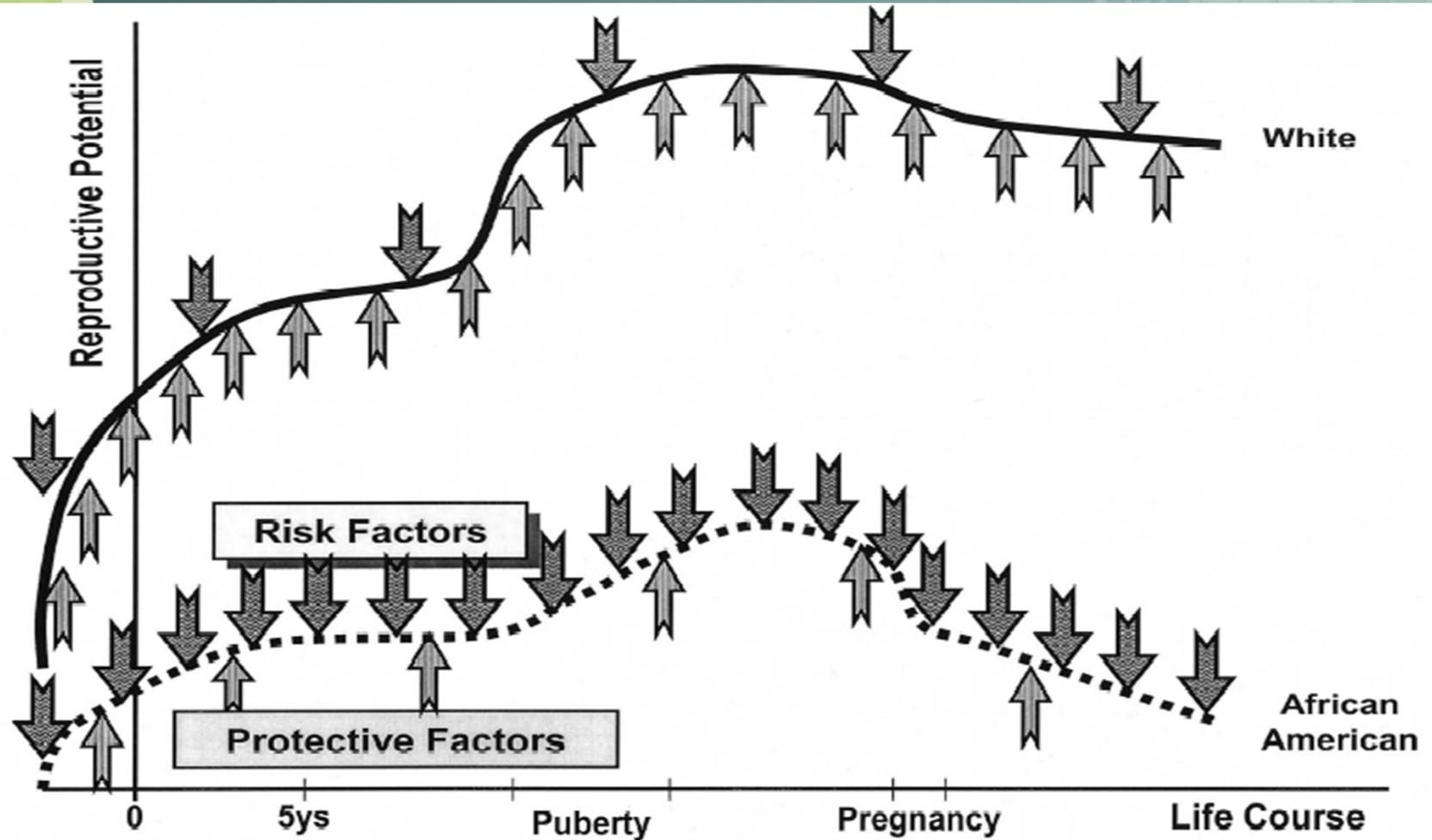
# Risk and Protective Factors

Protective factors improve health and contribute to healthy development.

Risk factors diminish health and make it more difficult to reach one's full potential.

In addition to individual behavior or access to health, factors can include family, neighborhood, community and social policy.

# Life Course Perspective



Lu MC, Halfon N. Racial and ethnic disparities in birth outcomes: a life-course perspective. *Maternal Child Health J.* 2003;7:13-30.

## Is Life Course Old or New?

### **LC marries long-term MCH concepts with new science**

- Barker Hypothesis
- Felitti's ACE Study
- Neurons to Neighborhoods, NAS
- Lu/Halfon
- Epi-genetics

## Critiques and Questions

- Early programming - too deterministic?
  - Too front-loaded? What does LC tell us about later life stages?
- CSHCN?
- Genetic services?

*Fine, 2011*

## Aligning Practice with LC

But, LC also...

- Greatly expands the opportunities for intervention:
  - a much broader set of venues and partners
  - over a much longer timeline
- Suggests the need for better linkage (vertical, horizontal, temporal)
- Encourages us to rethink and realign some of the current strategies and add new ones

*Fine, 2011*

## Life Course: Putting it into practice

- So, we talk about life course as a perspective, framework, theory, but how does it really work in the real world?

## Questions to consider

- How have you seen Life Course in action?
- What are the challenges to incorporating Life Course into your practice or program?
- What are some changes (big and small) that need to happen to make this work?

# HRSA/MCHB Concept Paper

## Rethinking MCH: The Life Course Model as an Organizing Framework

Prepared under contract by  
Amy Fine and Milton Kotelchuck  
October 2010

<http://mchb.hrsa.gov/lifecourseresources.htm>

# A Critical Approach to Life Course

## Confronting Social Disparities in Child Health: A Critical Approach of Life Course Science and Research

Pediatrics 2009; 124;S203-S211

By: Paul Wise, MD, MPH

DOI: 10.1542/peds2009-1100H

[www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/124/Supplement\\_3/S203](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/124/Supplement_3/S203)

# Maternal and Child Health Life Course Research Network

In October 2010, the Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities was awarded a three-year grant from the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) to develop a Maternal and Child Health Life Course Research Network (MCH LCRN). This exciting new project represents a unique opportunity to improve our understanding of how health develops over the life course by providing researchers, practitioners, policymakers and consumers with a transdisciplinary, translational and transformative mechanism for interacting, sharing information and tools, and engaging in collaborative and innovative projects.

<http://healthychild.ucla.edu/LCRN.asp>

## MCHB Resource Guide

- This site provides a number of key resources in the hopes that MCH Training Programs will partner with MCHB in exploring the implications of life course perspectives to improve the health and well-being of all women, children, youth and families now, and over future generations.

<http://mchb.hrsa.gov/lifecourseresources.htm>

## Top 5 Scientific Articles on Life Course

- Hertzman C, Boyce T. How experience gets under the skin to create gradients in developmental health. Annu Rev Public Health, 2010.31:329-347.
- Power C, Hertzman C. Social and biological pathways linking early life and adult disease. British Medical Bulletin 1997,53(No 1):210-221.
- Gluckman PD, Hanson MA, Cooper C, Thornburg KL. Effect of in utero and early-life conditions on adult health and disease. N Engl J Med 2008; 3;359(1):61-73. .
- Kuh D, Ben-Shlomo Y, Lynch J, Hallqvist J, Power C. Life course epidemiology. J Epidemiol Community Health 2003;57:778-783.
- Ben-Shlomo Y, Kuh D. A life course approach to chronic disease epidemiology: conceptual models, empirical challenges and interdisciplinary perspectives. International Journal of Epidemiology 2002;31:285-293.

## Examples of Local Initiatives

- Northern Manhattan Perinatal Partnership -- <http://www.sisterlink.com/>
- Harlem Children's Zone -- <http://www.hcz.org/programs/the-hcz-project>
- Contra Costa (CA) Health Department -- <http://www.cchealth.org/groups/lifecourse/> and [http://www.cchealth.org/groups/lifecourse/pdf/12\\_point\\_plan\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.cchealth.org/groups/lifecourse/pdf/12_point_plan_fact_sheet.pdf)
- Wisconsin Department of Health Services -- <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/healthybirths/pdf/abshealthyfamilies.pdf>